

A4

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2006

BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

# OPINION

## Montana may bear the impact of mass immigration

In a Nov. 12 article about immigration's looming presence in the Gallatin Valley, Chronicle reporter Gail Schontzler quoted Montana State University sociology Professor Leah Schnalzbauer and me. Most of what was attributed to Schnalzbauer is contradicted by the facts, as I will outline.

This enormous subject deserves continued exposure because, although not yet highly visible in Montana, mass immigration is causing burgeoning distress to citizens in much of the rest of our country. As Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo has said, "We are facing a situation, where if we don't control immigration, legal and illegal, we will eventually reach the point where it won't be what kind of a nation we are, balkanized or united, we will actually have to face the fact that we are no longer a nation at all."

Montanans may bear the impacts in two ways. Impacts can be direct, with large influxes of immigrants and illegal aliens imposing public costs and, instead of assimilating to us, expecting us to serve them in their native languages. Indeed, that was an underlying

thread in the Chronicle's article: Local public agencies are preparing for a surge in Spanish-speaking clients. The trajectory of such developments is well known from experiences in other states. Ultimately, Americans come to feel like strangers in their own country.

Mass immigration may also indirectly affect Montana. Example, for some years now, California's net population growth of 500,000 people per year has been entirely due to foreign immigration and births to foreign-born women. With the state's population now at 37 million, native-born Americans are moving to Idaho, Montana, and other states to escape California's metastasizing congestion and concomitant dysfunction, becoming, in a sense, internal refugees within the United States. In the interest of full disclosure, I am among California's "Class of 2005" refugees. (Of course, the "refugees" trope shouldn't be taken too far — most of us escape with substantially more than the clothes on our backs! But the operative word is still "escape.") If this surge out of California continues, Montana's glorious open



**PAUL NACHMAN**  
Guest columnist

spaces will fill up. According to Prof. Schnalzbauer, "Immigrant workers pay a lot of taxes." In fact, many illegal aliens pay zero income and payroll taxes, since they work off the books (i.e. for cash), so their sole contributions to public budgets are sales taxes and the real estate taxes incorporated in their rents. Illegal aliens who do have taxes withheld from paychecks are typically paid poorly enough that the taxes they remit are quite modest. And a large fraction of today's legal immigrants also fall into that "poorly paid" category.

Robert Rector, a formidable public policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation explains why: "Today's immigrants differ greatly from historic immigrant populations. Prior to 1960, immigrants to the U.S. had education

levels that were similar to those of the non-immigrant workforce and earned wages that were, on average, higher than those of non-immigrant workers. Since the mid-1960s, however, the education levels of new immigrants have plunged relative to non-immigrants. Consequently, the average wages of immigrants are now well below those of the non-immigrant population. Recent immigrants increasingly occupy the low end of the U.S. socioeconomic spectrum."

Professor Schnalzbauer also claimed that, following the 1996 federal Welfare Reform Act, very few immigrants and illegal aliens can receive public assistance, and "There's a myth out there they're tapping into public coffers."

Actually, it's no myth. In his 1999 book "Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy," Harvard economist George Borjas (himself an immigrant from Cuba) wrote: "By the 1990s, immigrants received a disproportionately large share of the welfare benefits distributed, and had a severe fiscal impact on some immigrant-receiving states, particularly

tion behind the wheel.

*Gale Kinzie  
Bozeman*

### Diversity is good

Where can you go to find Chinese, Mexican, Vietnamese, Italian, and just about all the other major ethnic foods you can think of? If you go to any major

been to many different countries where the people's feelings of nationalism has limited their ability to accept foreign ideas. Yet, our "melting pot" gives many groups of people the opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

*Jena Mathers  
Bozeman*

like money well spent to me.

Dr. Gamble, you were hired to make the decisions that you are making. Keep up the good work and may it continue for years to come.

*Ray Johnson  
Belgrade*

### Pay attention

*The Bozeman Daily Chronicle*

### LETTERS

instruments panels, the least used part of those vehicles is the turn signal indicator. Those now-new behemoths will in 20 years be rusted relics, but they will still have bright shiny unused appendages sticking out of the steering column.

So, with the cell phone glued to the ear, drivers in this town sail through